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COUNTY BOARDS OF AGRICULTURE

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County Land Use Planning Committees or County Boards of Agriculture as we know them in Virginia may rightfully be designated as the outposts of democracy. At this time when the practice of democracy is on trial for its life it is important that we council together concerning the maintenance, strengthening and use of these county and community committees of farm men and women which reach right down into the intimate life situations of the most remote and insignificant rural neighborhoods.

Not since the early New England town meetings have we had a program so well adapted to the practice of genuine democracy as we now have in the land use planning process.

Our national existence has become so complex in recent years that in spite of our faith in the principle of democracy in actual practice the seat of government seemed to move farther and farther from the individual citizen until he became almost a stranger to his own government. Gradually governing functions passed from local hands to those of less intimate acquaintances. For the sake of efficiency control and administration passed to more distant points. As the complexity of life increased so did the governing processes. Professional politicians and career men came more prominently into the picture and the need for highly technical and professional services continued to grow. The individual citizen came gradually to a point of bewilderment as this process developed on all sides of him until, with a shrug, he decided that things are not what they used to be and the best he could do was to stick to the machine and trust

that its beneficent leaders would provide for his needs without exacting the proverbial pound of flesh.

In the rural field the multiplication of agencies and specialized services were expressed in the creation of the AAA, the Soil Conservation Service, the Farm Security Administration, the REA, the Farm Credit Administration, the TVA, and other similar and related programs. It was well enough to have these agencies. They were created to satisfy unmet needs. It is well that they were set up almost entirely independent of each other. Each needed a chance to find the best means of performing the function for which it was created without being hamstrung by preconceived ideas and fixed administrative policies. Each independent agency was thus free to study objectively the experiences, successes and failures of other agencies and to draw upon them for advice and guidance but each was likewise free to establish a new and independent administrative course designed to reach more people and render new and different services. It is only fair to say that each new agency did naturally turn to and place great dependence in the long and well established Agricultural Extension Service with its widespread system of county farm and home agents and its thousands of well developed men and women leaders throughout the country.

But this course of completely independent action could not continue indefinitely. All agencies had a tendency to turn to the same more capable and outstanding leaders to serve on their independent administrative committees until these men often met with from three to five different executive committees in a single week. They, as practical farm men dependent upon their own labor for a living and seeing the farm and home as a unit, became painfully conscious of the number of separate and distinct, yet so

closely related agricultural programs. Sometimes they felt like a monkey on a string with too many different people pulling the string.

There was also a strong tendency for the different agencies to find the same families good cooperators and demonstrators. Occasional complaints were made that five or six representatives of different agencies called on some especially good farm demonstrator and his family in a single day. With thousands of bona fide farm families in each county these really serious cases of duplication were quite rare but they called attention to the need of some kind of correlation. There were also some rare instances where men who were inclined to be critical found, or thought they found, conflicting recommendations given them by the representatives of different agricultural agencies. Sometimes even the agency programs seemed to conflict when applied to a particular farm situation having some unusual features.

It is probable however that all these circumstances focus attention on the wrong side of the picture and that the conditions of greatest significance to program or land use planning and county boards of agriculture are of an entirely different nature.

Stated briefly and pointedly the big reason for the establishment of county boards of agriculture and the program planning process was the fact that when the work of all agencies was put together we still had only a fragmentary and inadequate agricultural program and the needs of a large proportion of farm families were not being met.

Some method had to be found to spread the leadership base; reach a larger proportion of the people; carry more information to farm people, develop and crystalize their judgements and bring them more directly into

the determination and execution of programs; to correlate the work of all agencies and to formulate a general agricultural program based on facts about existing conditions and designed to meet the needs of all the typical farm and family situations in the county.

And so the apparent drift away from democracy led inevitably back to this democratic process which now extends into 47 states and more than 1600 counties. It is estimated that 17,000 county, state and regional employees of public agricultural agencies and over 90,000 farm men and women are participating in program planning activities in leadership capacities. The farm families affected by the resulting changes and developments in programs run well into the millions. Farm people are now having the most direct and active part in determining what programs shall be, and how they shall be administered of any time since the government provided substantial assistance to agriculture.

Let us examine for a moment the general procedures used in county agricultural program planning. A statement of the procedures in any state would differ slightly from that of any other state but the same principles are generally recognized throughout the country and the differences are chiefly in techniques or methods of procedure.

The work in a Virginia county is started in a meeting of the professional employees of all agricultural agencies working in the county to explain the purpose and procedure in land use planning. Arrangements are then made to prepare a community-neighborhood map of the county. This map provides the geographic basis for the selection of neighborhood representatives which constitute the community agricultural committees. By a glance at one of these maps we see that the entire county area has been divided into a few larger community areas and that each of the communities

have been divided into smaller areas generally referred to as neighborhoods. This map is often referred to as an "association pattern". It is based upon the natural associations or groupings of people in the regular social and economic affairs of life. Sometimes where communities or neighborhoods are too large for practical administrative purposes they are arbitrarily divided into smaller administrative areas but to avoid confusion each sub-division is still referred to as a community or neighborhood as the case may be. On the basis of experience in Virginia it has been found expedient to subdivide communities with more than ten or twelve neighborhoods and to subdivide neighborhoods with more than 40-50 families. These maps are prepared by program planning field men in cooperation with all professional agricultural workers in the county and in personal conference with large numbers of farm people, store keepers, teachers, ministers and others throughout the county.

The county board of agriculture is organized with a man and woman chairman in each community and a man and woman committee member in each neighborhood. The members and chairmen in each community constitute the community agricultural committee. The chairman from all communities, along with the professional workers and a few members-at-large, constitute the executive committee of the county board and all community committees together make up the entire membership of the county board. The frequent meetings of professional workers necessitated by the program are referred to as professional workers' conferences. They meet regularly each month, the executive committee meets quarterly, and the community committees meet quarterly immediately after the executive committee meetings.

With a committee man and woman for every small neighborhood area of 25-40 families and with these committee members grouped under the leadership of community committee chairmen we have the most complete organization of farm people that we have ever had in America.

The first work done by each community committee is to prepare a complete list of all families in each neighborhood. These are numbered by neighborhoods and located on a map provided for this purpose. With the communities and neighborhoods also numbered, it is possible to locate geographically any family in the county in less than a minute. Copies of this map are available to all agricultural agencies and to each committee member. They are quite valuable in all later planning work.

The next basic but preliminary work done by the board is to make a reconnisant social and economic, crop and livestock survey of each farm and family. This is again done by neighborhoods and with each man and woman committee member having only 25-40 families it is not too difficult a job. This survey along with the land use map which is prepared next provides the factual basis upon which subsequent planning and work are based.

The committee members take a keen interest in both the survey and the land use mapping providing they can complete each job quickly and not let them drag out and become boresome.

The results of both the mapping and the survey are often quite surprising. The old saying that "truth is stranger than fiction" is illustrated again. Men in some counties can scarcely believe that three-fourths the county area is woodland and yet there it is as shown by the

aerial photographs and not subject to question. Similar surprise is often found in the proportion of the open land which the farmers themselves classify as unprofitable for agricultural use. (See map). Even the location and proportion of the areas requiring radical changes in production methods or those most favored areas where only minor improvements can be made are surprising when presented concisely on an accurate base map. But this map is only a partial basis for planning.

If there are surprises in soil conditions and the distribution of land use areas there are still greater surprises in the facts about the people, their homes, their livestock and their cropping practices.

For instance in the Bluestone Community of Mecklenburg County the committee members were surprised at several of the following facts which they themselves reported on a family by family basis. Thirty percent of the families were colored; there were twice as many boys as girls in the community between the ages of 18-23 years; approximately half the families had less than \$300 to spend for family living each year; many of the low-income families were producing little food, 10% had no cows, 11% no pigs, 6% no chickens, and 7% had no gardens. Only 2% had 10 or more cows, 8% had 6 or more pigs, and 1% had as many as 150 chickens. Needless to say the people in this open country community were depending on a poor paying cash crop for a living. In this case it was bright tobacco.

The housing situation in the community was not good. Twenty-five per cent of the white families and 60% of the negroes lived in houses valued at less than \$400. Seventy per cent were without electricity, 95% without running water, 88% without power washers, 29% had no screens, and 41% had no sanitary toilets. Fifty per cent of them did not have an automobile.

Of the 404 families in the community 52% were owners, 25% renters, and 23% croppers. The population was highly mobile with 39% having been in their present residence five years or less. Needless to say 55% of the families did not attend church regularly and 75% did not attend any regular educational or recreational meetings. This is no horror situation. It is in many respects an above the average situation for Middle Atlantic and Southeastern States. Yet these facts summed up and analyzed startled the committee members who had lived in the area all their lives and presented the information for tabulation. When the information concerning cropping practices was also summarized the people of this community had for the first time in their lives an adequate basis for planning. The committees are finding that it is one thing to carry around a lot of scattered information and general impressions and quite a different thing to get that same information that they have been carrying around in their heads down in a tangible and orderly form so it can be studied objectively. The land use planning process helps people to find out things about themselves that they never realized were true. It puts farm leaders in a position to begin doing something about situations that need attention. It makes them articulate by providing them with factual material and a channel through which to make these facts known to those who can assist farm leaders most in making needed adjustments.

Such an analysis of a situation brings to light a better balanced judgment. There has sometimes been a tendency for programs to be focused on the problems of the larger farmers who are producing agricultural products for sale. Program planning in Virginia has brought to light the fact that there are a great many more subsistence farmers, part-time farmers,

and rural non-farm families who complicate the rural situation quite as much as the man who is struggling to make enough cash out of farming to maintain a high standard of living. In fact, recent analyses have indicated that far the greater proportion of all farm families have had to depend more on their cash from other sources than on the net cash received from the sale of farm products.

When information about farms and families throughout a whole county has been gathered and tabulated by neighborhoods it is then possible to recognize characteristic similarities and differences in different parts of the county. With this to go by county boards review the whole county situation and regroup the neighborhoods into social and economic areas within which conditions are fairly homogeneous. It is then much easier to plan adjustments by these areas than by communities and neighborhoods. These areas are most peculiar in size and shape, however, and do not conform to community lines or natural association patterns at all. For this reason adjustments are planned by areas but plans of work are more generally prepared by communities and neighborhoods. Many county-wide or inter-community plans are also prepared by the county board or special committee representing it.

A brief summary of the work of our most advanced unified county will provide a good illustration of the nature and breadth of program which evolves in a county over a period of two or three years.

The county was divided into eight communities, 52 neighborhoods and 10 social and economic areas. Four of the areas were listed as good to excellent farming areas, one as a distinct part-time farming area, and the remaining five as widely differing problem areas.

Of the five problem areas, Area A was recommended for subsistence farming with some limited emphasis on poultry and small fruits. Area C was recommended for public purchase and improvement for grazing and large scale farming. Area G for the production of timothy hay, red cedar posts and subsistence agriculture; Area H for the production of sour cream, sheep and a limited number of hogs, and Area J was recommended for public purchase and development as a forest and recreation area.

In addition to these more technical production recommendations an entire office building has been rented and all agricultural agencies officed together, a special Soil Conservation District has been established and a CCC Camp secured, the Farm Security Office has been moved in from a neighboring county and a special pre-standard program with two extra workers added and the case load increased from 22 to over 100, an REA cooperative has been established with 210 miles of line, plans are under way for a cooperatively owned and managed refrigerating locker plant, a livestock auction market has been established, an eighteen year old fight for a home demonstration agent has just been won, a special cooperative farm and home management research project was started one week ago in the disadvantaged areaA referred to above, the triple A sign-up in the county has been increased nearly 30% after a lag for three or four years, and finally, a group medical care program is nearing completion which will provide adequate medical care for 500 low-income families in the county on a flat rate paid in advance basis.

Many other minor accomplishments have been realized and the changes in attitude on the part of the people and leaders, the prestige of the County Board and the momentum which the program has gained in the county

are all more intangible but none the less real advantages which have been gained to date.

In closing may I add that well organized County Boards of Agriculture with their minute men in every local neighborhood and their well organized and experienced county executive committees may well prove to be valuable assets as we move forward with our program of total defense. Already county boards in Floyd, Giles, Montgomery and Pulaski counties have cooperated with the regional Defense Council in making provision for a large powder plant on which 23,000 workers have been employed and the Caroline County Board has cooperated with the Army in the establishment of a 71,000 acre artillery maneuver area. The boards throughout the State are sponsoring the Nutrition program and the general feeling is that work of this kind is only well begun. County Boards of Agriculture stand ready and able to work and to serve the County, the State and the Nation.

